Are On-Site Courses as Effective as Online?

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Despite the fact that online learning is a pretty well-established learning modality, there are those who continue to discuss and debate whether online is "equivalent" to on site. There are thousands of "no significant difference" studies. For those of us who have been online for some time, the issue is settled. We no longer entertain the question. It is a moot point with us. In fact, a recent experience of simultaneously teaching online and onsite has me asking quite the opposite question: Are on-site courses as effective as online?

Perhaps it is time to change the discussion. Having become acclimated to facilitating online, I find myself declining on-site courses. As I reflect upon my tendency to do so, I realize that it is a matter of efficiency. From my vantage point at this time, on-site courses are less *efficient* for me compared to online. Nevertheless, this term I accepted one and have had occasion to reflect upon the experience.

In preparing to teach on site, I found myself spending time making photocopies rather than designing learning activities, the equivalent of on-site prepping for the class. At the outset, in trying to present PowerPoint slides, I discovered the room was not equipped for such an approach. In addition, as the class sessions took place, there was this phenomenon called *student absences.* These were disruptive to the continuous flow of the course as students were at different places in their understanding of material. This is problematic in courses where the material is linked and builds toward a comprehensive understanding, such as accounting.

When students submitted assignments, I found myself toting disorganized stacks of material rather than viewing them through an electronic grade book. I always know where the papers are and haven't lost any with the electronic grade book.

In anticipation of giving tests, I found myself wandering the halls looking for a Scantron machine. If these inefficiencies of on-site course management are the case for me, I began to wonder about the efficiency of the course from the student perspective. Moreover, as I realized the drain the inefficiency of the on-site course had on my personal efficacy in the classroom, I then began to wonder if it had the same impact on the students. I wondered if the course is as *effective* for them as my online students.

Academically, I have 20 years of experience teaching the subject with six different institutions. But how does this compare with the fact that the vast majority of these sections are taught by adjunct instructors who have likely not studied curriculum design and who take on the course for additional income? According to the students, many of the adjuncts tend to stray from the syllabus, whereas online the students are all completing the same learning activities regardless of the facilitator in our system.